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THE MOON

By J. C. SQUIRE

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THE MOON

I

I waited for a miracle to-night.
  Dim was the earth beneath a star-swept sky,
Her boughs spread vague in that phantasmal light,
  Her current rippled past invisibly.
No stir was in the dark and windless meadows,
Only the water whispering in the shadows
  That darkened nature lived did still proclaim.
An hour I stood in that defeat of sight,
  Waiting, and then a sudden silver flame
  Burned in the eastern heaven, and she came.

II

The Moon, the Summer Moon, surveys the vale:
  The boughs against the dawning sky grow black,
The shades that hid those whispering waters fail,
  And now there falls a gleaming lengthening track
That lies across the wide and tranquil river
Burnished and flat, not shaken by a quiver.
  She rises still: the liquid light she spills
Makes everywhere quick sparkles, patches pale,
  And, as she goes, I know her glory fills
  The air of all our English lakes and hills.

III

High over all this England doth she ride,
  She silvers all the roofs of folded towns,
Her brilliance tips the edge of every tide,
  Her shadows make soft caverns in the downs;
Even now beyond my tree serenely sailing,
She clothes far forests with a gauzy veiling,
  And even as here, where now I stare and dream,
Standing my own transfigured banks beside,
  On many a quiet wandering English stream
  There lies the unshifting image of her beam.

IV

Yes, calm she mounts, and watching her, I know
  By many a river other eyes than mine
Turn up to her; and, as of old, they show
  Their inward hearts all naked to her shine:
Maids, solitaries, sick and happy lovers,
To whom her dear returning orb discovers
  For each the gift he waits for: soft release,
The unsealing of imagination's flow,
  Her own sweet pain, or other pain's surcease,
  The friendly benediction of her peace.

V

I gaze as they: as kind she is, as fair,
  As when long since a boy's young heart drank deep
From that sweet solace when, through summer air
  Her lucid fingers hushed the world to sleep.
O as I stand this latest moon beholding,
Her forms unresting memory is moulding:
  Beneath my enchanted eyelids there arise
Visions again of many moons that were,
  Fair, fleeting moons gathered from faded skies,
  Greeted and lost by these corporal eyes.

VI

Unnumbered are those moons of memory
  Stored in the backward chambers of my brain:
The moons that make bright pathways on the sea,
  The golden harvest moon above the grain;
The moon that all a sleeping village blanches,
The woodland moon that roves beyond the branches,
  Filtering through the meshes of the green
To breast of bird and mossy trunk of tree;
  Moons dimly guessed-at through a cloudy screen,
  The bronze diffusion shed by moons unseen.

VII

Moons that a thin prismatic halo rings,
  Looking a hurrying fleecy heaven through:
The fairy moons of luminous evenings,
  Phantoms of palest pink in palest blue;
Large orange moons on earth's grey verge suspended,
When trees still slumber from the heat that's ended,
  Erect and heavy, and all waters lie
Oily, and there is not a bird that sings.
  All these I know, I have seen them born and die,
  And many another moon in many a sky.

VIII

There was a moon that shone upon the ground
  Where on a grassy forest height I stood.
Bright was that open place, and all around
  The dense discovered treetops of the wood
Line after line, in misty radiance glistened,
Failing away. I watchd the scene and listened;
  Then, awed and hushed, I turned and saw alone
Protruding from the middle of the mound,
  Fringed with close grass, a moonlight-mottled stone,
  Rough-carven, of antiquity unknown.

IX

A night there was: a crowd: a narrow street:
  Torches that reddened faces drunk with dreams:
An orator exultant in defeat:
  Banners: fierce songs: rough cheering: women's screams:
My heart was one with those rebellious people,
Until along a chapel's pointing steeple
  My eyes unwitting wandered, and I found
A moon, and clouds a swift and ragged sheet;
  And in my spirit's ears all human sound
  Died, and eternal silence lived around.

X

And once, on a far evening, warm and still,
I leant upon a cool stone parapet.
The quays and houses underneath the hill
Twinkled with lights; I heard the sea's faint fret;
And then above the eastern cape's long billow
Silent there welled a trembling line of yellow,
A shred that quickened, then a half that grew
To a full moon, that moved with even will.
The night was long before her, well she knew,
And, as she slowly rose into the blue.

XI

She slowly paled, and glittering far away,
Flung on the silken waters like a spear,
Her crisped silver shaft of moonlight lay;
The lighthouse lamp upon the little pier
Burned wanly by that radiance clear and certain.
Waiting I knew not what unfolded curtain,
I watched the unmoving world beneath my feet
Till, without warning, miles across the bay,
Into that silver, out of shadows beat
Dead black, the whole mysterious fishing-fleet.

XII

These moons I have seen, but these and every one
Came each so new it seemed to be the first,
New as the buds that open to the sun,
New as the songs that to the morning burst.
The roses die, each day fresh flowers are springing,
Last year it was another blackbird singing,
But thou, most marvellous blossom, whose lone flower
Beyond mankind's conjecture hath begun,
Retain'st for ever an unwithering power
That stales the loveliest stranger of an hour.

XIII

But O, had all my infant nights been dark,
  Or almost dark, lit by the stars alone,
Had never a teller of stories bid me hark
  The promised splendours of that moon unknown:
How marvellous then had been the revelation
When first her gradual gold illumination
  Broke on a night upon the conscious child:
My heart had stopped with beauty, seeing her arc,
  Climbing the heavens, so far and undefiled,
  So large with light, so even and so mild.

XIV

Most wondrous Light, who bring'st this lovelier earth,
  This world of shadows cool with silver fires,
Drawing us higher than our human birth;
  To whom our strange twin-natured kind suspires
Its saddest thoughts, and tenderest and most fragrant
Tears, and desires unnameable and vagrant:
  Watcher, who leanest quietly from above,
Saying all mortal wars are nothing worth;
  Friend of the sorrowful, tranquil as the dove,
  Muse of all poets, lamp of all who love.

XV

Alone and sad, alone and kind and sweet,
  But always peaceful and removed and proud,
Whether with loveliness revealed complete
  Or veiling from our vision in a cloud:
Our souls' eternal listener, could we wonder
That men who made of sun and storm and thunder
  The awful forms of strong divinity,
Heard in each storm the noise of travelling feet,
  Should, gazing at thy face with hearts made free,
  Have felt a pure, Immortal Power in thee?

XVI

Selene, Cynthia and Artemis,
The swift proud goddess with the silver bow,
Diana, she whose downward-bending kiss
One only knew, though all men yearned to know:
The shepherd on a hill his flock was keeping,
The night's pale huntress came and found him sleeping:
She stooped: he woke, and saw her hair that shone,
And lay, drawn up to cool and timeless bliss,
Lapt in her radiant arms, Endymion,
All the still night, until the night was gone.

XVII

By many names they knew thee, but thy shape
Was woman's always, transient and white:
A flashing huntress leaving hinds agape,
A sweet descent of beauty in the night:
Yet some, more fierce and more distraught their dreaming,
Brooded, until they fashioned from thy seeming,
A lithe and luring queen with fatal breath,
A witch the man who saw might not escape,
A snare that gleamed in shadowy groves of death,
The tall tiaraed Syrian Ashtoreth.

XVIII

And even to-night in African forests some
There are, possessed by such a blasphemy;
Through branching beams thy fevered votaries come
To appease their brains' distorted mask of thee.
There in the glades the drums pulsate and languish,
Men leap and wail to dim the victim's anguish,
In the sad frenzy of the sacrifice.
They are slaves to thee, made mad because thou art dumb,
And dumb thou lookest on them from the skies,
Above their fires and dances, blood and cries.

XIX

So these: but otherwise, at such an hour,
In all the continents, by all the seas,
Men, naming not the goddess, feel thy power,
Adoring her with gentler rites than these:
The thoughts of myriad hearts to thee uplifted
Rise like a smoke above thine altars drifted,
Perpetual incense poured before thy throne
By those whom thou hast given thy secret dower,
Those in whose kindred eyes thy light is known,
Whom thou hast signed and sealed for thine own.

XX

For thee they watch by Asian peaks remote,
Where thy snows gleam above the pointing pines;
Entranced on temple lakes is many a boat
For thee, where clear thy dropt reflection shines;
On the great seas where none but thee is tender
Rising and setting, unto thee surrender
All lonely hearts in lonely wandering ships;
And, where their warm far-scattered islands float,
Through forests many a flower-crowned maiden slips
To gaze on thee, with parted burning lips.

XXI

O thus they do, and thus they did of old.
Our hearts were never secret in thy sight;
Ere records first were born thy shrine was old
That speechless eyes went seeking in the night;
Beyond the compass of our dim traditions
Thou knewest of men the pitiful ambitions,
Their loves and their despair; within thy ken
All our poor history has been unrolled;
Thou hast seen all races born and die again,
The climbing and the crumbling towers of men.

XXII

Black were the hollows of that Emperor's eyes
  Who paced with backward arms beyond his tents,
Lone in the night, and felt above him rise
  The ancient conqueror's sloping immense
Moon-pointing Pyramid's enduring courses,
Heard not his sentries, nor his stamping horses,
  But thought of Egypt dead upon that air,
Fighting with his moon-coloured memories
  Of vanished kings who builded, and the bare
  Sands in the moon before those builders were.

XXIII

Restless, he knew that moon who watched him muse
  Had seen a restless Caesar brood on fame
Amid the Pharaohs' broken avenues.
  And, circling round that fixed monition, came
Woven by moonlight, random, transitory,
Fragments of all the dim receding story:
  The moonlit water dripping from the oars
Of triremes in the bay of Syracuse;
  The opposing bivouacs upon the shores
  That knew dead Hector's and Achilles' wars.

XXIV

He saw fall'n Carthage, Alexander's grave,
  The tomb of Moses in the wilderness,
The moonlight on the Atlantean wave
  That covered all a multitude's distress:
Cities and hosts and emperors departed
Under the steady moon, and sullen-hearted,
  He turned away, and, in a little, died,
Even as he who hunted from his cave
  And struck his foe, and stripped the shaggy hide
  Under the moon, and was not satisfied.

XXV

For in the prime, thy influence was felt;
When eyes first saw, thy beauty was as this;
Thy quiet look bade hope, fear, passion melt
Before men dreamed of empire. The abyss
Of thought yawned through their jungle then, as ever,
Dark past, dark future, menaced their endeavor,
Yet, on thy nights, stood some by hill and sea
Naked; and blind impulsive spirits knelt,
Not questioning why they knelt, feeling in thee
Thought's strangest, sweetest, saddest mystery.

XXVI

Still moon, bright moon, compassionate moon above,
Thou shined'st there ere any life began,
When of his pain or of his powerless love
Thou heardest not from heart of any man.
Though long the earth had shaken off the vapour
Left by the vanished gleams of fire, the shaper,
Old, old, her stony wrinkled face did grow
Ere aught but her blind elements did move:
Dumb, bare and prayerless thou saw'st her go:
And afterwards again shalt see her so.

XXVII

A time there was when Life had never been,
A time will be, it will have passed away.
Still wilt thou shine, still tender and serene,
When Life which in thy sister's yesterday
Had never flowered, will have drooped and faded,
Passed with the clouds that once her bosom shaded:
She will be barren then as not before,
Bared of her snows and all her garments green;
No darkling sea by any earthly shore
Will take thy rays; thy kin will be no more.

XXVIII

Pale satellite, old mistress of our fires,
Who hast seen so much and been so much to men,
Symbol and goal of all our wild desires,
Not any voice will cry upon thee then;
Dreamer and dream, they will have all gone over,
The sick of heart, the singer and the lover,
An end there will have been to all their lust,
Their sorrow, and the sighing of their lyres:
O all this Life that stained Earth's patient crust
Time's dying breath will have blown away like dust.

XXIX

Gone from thine eye that brief confusèd stir,
The rumours and the marching and the strife;
Earth will be still, and all the face of her
Swept of the last remains of moving life.
The last of all men's monuments that defied them,
Like those his valiant gestures that denied them,
Into the waiting elements will fade,
And thou wilt see thy fellow traveller,
A forlorn round of rocky contours made,
A glimmering disk of empty light and shade.

XXX

Ah depth too deep for thought therein to cast!
The old, the cold companions, you will go,
Obeying still some long-forgotten past,
And all our pitiful history none will know;
Still shining, moon, still peaceful, wilt thou wander,
But on that greater ball no heart will ponder
The thought that rose and nightingale are gone,
And all sweet things but thou; and only vast
Ridges of rock remain, and stars and sun.
O Moon, thou wilt be lovely alone for none.

XXXI

And so, pale wanderer, so thou leavest me,
  Passing beyond imagination's range,
Away into the void where waits for thee
  Thy inconceivable destiny of change.
And after all the memories I have striven
To paint, this picture that thyself hast given
  Lives, and I watch, to all those others blind,
Thy form, gliding into eternity,
  Fading, an unconjectured fate to find,
  The last, most wonderful image of the mind.

XXXII

Moon, I have finished, I have made thy song,
  I have paid my due and done my worship, moon,
Yet, though I truly serve and labour long,
  Thou givest not, nor do I ask, one boon:
That peace which clings around thee where thou goest
Which many seek from thee and thou bestowest,
  Did never this most faithful heart invest. . . .
Even now thou shinest clear and calm and strong,
  And I, and I, the heart within my breast,
  Troubled with beauty, moon, and never at rest.

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